

James Madison to George Washington, April 10, 1788. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO GEORGE WASHINGTON. WASH. MSS.

Orange April 10 1788.

Dear Sir,

Having seen a part only of the names returned for the Convention, and being unacquainted with the political characters of many of them, I am a very incompetent prophet of the fate of the Constitution. My hopes however are much encouraged by my present conjectures. Those who have more data for their calculations than I have, augur a flattering issue to the deliberations of June. I find that Col. Nicholas,¹ who is among the best judges, thinks on

¹ George Nicholas wrote to Madison from Charlottesville, April 5, that there was a slight majority of federalists in the members elected to the Virginia convention, but that some of them would, he feared, be unwilling "to give the best hand" to the Constitution, unless the conduct of the other States justified it. If the Maryland and South Carolina conventions adjourned until Virginia had spoken the influence against favorable action by Virginia would be serious. Would Madison, therefore, impress upon his friends in those States the necessity for favorable action. Mr. Pendleton was being urged to favor amendments before ratification, but Madison was expected to prevent any change in his views. The opposition of Mason was due to his irritation and to the "vain opinion he entertains (which has industriously been supported by some particular characters) that he has influence enough

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to dictate a constitution to Virginia, and through her to the rest of the union. Mr. Henry is now almost avowedly an enemy to the union.... His real sentiments will be industriously concealed, for so long as he talks only of amendments such of the friends to the union, as object to particular parts of the constitution will adhere to him, which they would not do a moment, if they could be convinced of his real design. I hope to be possessed of sufficient information by the meeting of the convention to make that matter clear, and if I am it shall not be withheld. The opposition except from that quarter will be feeble. Our friend E. R. [andolph] talks of a compromise between the friends of the union, but I know of but one that can safely take place; and that is on the plan of the Massachusetts convention: it appears to me impossible that another continental convention assembled to deliberate on the whole subject, should ever agree on any general plan.

“Let the decision of our convention be what it may, I think it will be of great consequence that an address to the people at large should go forth from such of the members as are friends to the constitution: if this had been done in Pennsylvania, it would have counteracted much of the poison contained in the *dissent of the minority*...but if this government is rejected, America will be left without one, at least only in possession of one which all parties agree is insufficient; it will therefore be our duty to state to the people the necessity of a change and place in its true point of view the one now offered Nine tenths of the people are strong friends to the union, and such of them as are opposed to the proposed government are so upon suppositions not warranted by the thing itself. No person in the convention can so well prepare this address as yourself, and if it appears as important in your eyes as it does to me, I hope that you will undertake it The greater part of the members of the convention will go to the meeting without information on the subject, it will be very important to give this as early as may be, and if possible before—they go from home. *Publius* or *the foederalist* if it is published in a pamphlet, would do it better than any other work; if it is published can I get the favor of you to procure me thirty or forty copies of it, that I may distribute them....

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“The only danger I apprehend is from the Kentucky members; and one consideration only has any weight with them: a fear that if the new government should take place, that their navigation would be given up.”— *Mad. MSS.*

the whole, that a majority in the Convention will be on the list of federalists; but very properly takes into view the turn that may be given to the event by the weight of Kentucky if thrown into the wrong scale, and by the proceedings of Maryland and South Carolina, if they should terminate in either a rejection or postponement of the question. The impression on Kentucky, like that on the rest of the State was at first answerable to our wishes; but, as elsewhere, the torch of discord has been thrown in and has found the materials but too inflammable. I have written several letters since my arrival to correspondents in that district, with a view to counteract anti-federal machinations. I have little expectation however that they will have much effect, unless the communications that may go from Mr. Brown in Congress, should happen to breathe the same spirit; and I am not without apprehensions that his mind may have taken an unlucky tincture from the difficulties thrown in the way of the separation of the district, as well as from some antecedent proceedings of Congress. I have taken the

liberty of writing also to a friend in South Carolina on the critical importance of a right decision there to a favorable one here. The inclosed letter which I leave unsealed will shew you that I am doing the same with respect to Maryland. Will you be so good as to put a wafer in it and to send it to the post office for George Town, or to change the address to Annapolis, if you should have reason to conclude that Mr. Carrol will be there? I have written a similar letter to Docr. McHenry. The difference between even a postponement and adoption in Maryland, may in the nice balance of parties here, possibly give a fatal advantage to that which opposes the Constitution.

I have done nothing yet in preparing answers to the queries. As facts are to be ascertained as well as opinions formed delay will be of course counted upon.

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With every sentiment of respect and attachment

I remain Dear Sir, Your Obedient & humble Servt.